

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
Marine Corps University
User's Guide to Marine Corps Values

LEADER STYLES

1. Introduction. Our goal as Marines is to fight and win wars. We accomplish this goal by drawing upon experiences gained from reading, through personal experience, and often from techniques passed down from Marine to Marine. Leadership is the life-blood of the Marine Corps. Unfortunately, there is no single manual or course of instruction that teaches the many styles of leadership. Instead, it is up to each Marine to capture his/her own ideas and lessons learned, combine them with current Marine Corps doctrine, and pass on to their fellow Marines the importance of leadership.

2. Overview. The purpose of this discussion is to show that different situations dictate different leadership styles. In addition, it will offer suggestions on how to identify the most appropriate leadership style for a given situation.

3. References. The following provide additional information about leadership and its various styles:

FMFM 1-0, Leading Marines

4. Discussion Leader Notes

a. By the end of this discussion, all attendees should be able to identify the four types of leadership styles as discussed.

b. Use various scenarios and reference to aid in the identification of corresponding leadership styles.

5. Discussion

a. Leadership style is the behavior pattern of a leader, as perceived by his/her Marines, while the leader is attempting to influence, guide, or direct their activities. Therefore, a Marine's leadership style is not always determined by his/her thoughts, but rather by the subordinate's. A leader must always be aware of this perception and how to best approach subordinates in various situations.

b. Leadership styles range from autocratic, the degree of authority used by the leader, to democratic, the degree of authority granted to the subordinate. The following are the four most common styles of leadership found in the Corps today.

(1) Telling Style. One-way communication characterized by the leader making a decision and announcing it without input from subordinates. In a crisis, the leader is expected to be an authoritarian. As leaders, Marines are expected to always be ready to step to the forefront and take control of any given situation. As warfighters there will be times that we will make decisions without input from subordinates, especially during tense and/or dangerous situations.

(2) Selling Style. The leader presents a decision and invites questions and comments. This style allows subordinates to know why and what went into the decision-making process. Although this style only allows minimal participation from subordinates, it provides an avenue for better understanding, and when effectively used, it can further motivate those executing the plan. Remember, perception is the key. When leaders take subordinates into their confidence and foster two-way communication, a degree of trust and respect is formed both ways.

(3) Participating Style. With this style, the leader presents a problem, gets suggestions and makes a decision. Good two-way communication between the leader and subordinates is paramount for this style. Leaders should discuss possible alternative solutions before making their decision. This leadership style promotes initiative and ingenuity among subordinates.

(4) Delegating Style. When using this style, it is important that the leader's goals, objectives, and restrictions are clear to subordinates. The leader defines limits and allows subordinates to make decisions within those limits. This style uses mission-type orders and guidelines to issue the leader's intent. The subordinate then executes the plan and performs all tasks both specified and implied with minimal supervision. This style hinges on the trust and confidence the leader places in his/her subordinates.

c. Style Variance. Leadership styles will vary depending on the amount of authority the leader decides to use or delegate. For example, when a leader is dealing with inexperienced subordinates and has a mission to complete within a tight timeline, the leader may use the telling style. On the other hand, when a leader has multiple tasks to complete, the delegating style could be a good choice. To exercise good leadership, a Marine must be consistent; however, his/her leadership style must be flexible since no one style is applicable for all situations. Other factors that will influence a particular style a leader will use are:

(1) Ability, experience, and training of subordinates.

The greater the ability of a Marine or a group of Marines to accomplish the mission/task, the less direct supervision and guidance needed.

(2) Motivation and willingness. The level of motivation and willingness is directly proportional to the amount of "push" the leader will need to exert to accomplish the mission/task. Motivated Marines are a by-product of effective leadership.

(3) Mission/task. The more complex the mission or task, the greater the need for specific direction from the leader as to the who, what, when, where, why, and how, unless the subordinate has relatively equal knowledge and experience of the mission/task at hand.

(4) Size, composition, and organization. Larger groups tend to be more diversified in composition and require greater organization. A well-organized and well-led unit will produce outstanding results.

(5) Expectations of subordinates. The expectations of subordinates are especially important during transition periods between leaders. During these transition periods, subordinates "size-up" their new leaders. Therefore, the leader needs to be aware that some confusion and difficulty may occur in the communication process between the leader and subordinates because of the difference in leadership styles to which they may be accustomed.

(6) Trust in subordinates. The higher the degree of trust a leader has in subordinates, the greater the degree of flexibility the leader will have when choosing the proper leadership style for a given situation. A low degree of trust in subordinates severely limits the leader's options when choosing a style of leadership.

(7) The leader's morals. The importance of high moral standards cannot be over-emphasized. The title Marine is synonymous with trust and responsibility. Marines must understand that, along with the title, comes a burden of responsibility to uphold our profession honorably. High standards are expected of Marines, who must always act and carry themselves accordingly. A leader positively reinforces these standards by demonstrating high moral values in his/her own leadership style. Leaders today must be at the forefront in standing for what is right and just. Marines find comfort in knowing that their leader is morally and ethically sound and can always be counted upon to do the right thing. The right morals and values must be the cornerstone of every leader's philosophy and leadership style.

(8) The leader's degree of confidence. A confident leader creates confidence in his/her subordinates. As a normal rule, Marines react very well under cool and calm leadership, especially when the leader displays this confidence under stressful and/or dangerous situations.

(9) The leader's success with a particular style of leadership used before in a similar situation. Leaders have a tendency to lean toward a particular style when it has been successfully proven to work in the past under similar situations. A proven leadership style is of value. However, just because it worked once before does not mean that it will work every time.

(10) The styles of leadership that the leader has been exposed to in his/her time in the Corps. If a leader has been exposed to a certain leadership style, especially early on in the leader's career, this style has a tendency to influence the leader regardless of whether the style was good or bad. Leaders should continue to learn what works effectively for them, thereby enhancing their own style of leadership. One must also make note of what causes confusion and take measures to preclude this from happening.

(11) The type of personality the leader possesses. All Marines have a natural leadership style with which they are comfortable. It is important to be oneself and not to make a style of leadership work when it does not conform to one's own personality. Marines can see through these types of leaders, a fact that inhibits trust and respect between subordinate and leader. Genuine care and concern will pay the type of dividends that all leaders want to achieve.

d. Personalities. It is unrealistic to think that one style of leadership can be used effectively to obtain the desired results in every situation. Command is the projection of the leader's personality. Leadership is closely related to one's personality. A leadership style that works well for one may not work well for another. Leadership styles are most effective when they become an implementation of the leader's own philosophy and temperament and when they fit the situation, task and the Marines to be led. Marines should strive to promote all that is positive in their style of leading.

e. Summary. The bottom line of leadership is to accomplish the mission and look out for the welfare of those led. A leader's style must be flexible enough to meet any situation while providing for the needs of subordinates. One thing in common among great leaders is the ability to read how people will perceive a given order or action, and use the approach that will

effectively communicate the leader's orders to subordinates. Never be afraid to use different styles because the situation and those to be led will never be the same twice. Be dynamic and be the best role model mentally, morally and physically that you can be. Leaders today create the Corps of tomorrow.